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# Reagan faces aftershocks of Iran affair

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The Reagan administration's damage control strategy isn't working - yet.

The controversy over the administration's secret arms sales to Iran, coupled with revelations that profits from the sale were diverted to Nicaraguan contra forces, is widening.

Congress is gearing up to conduct its own probes. The White House still appears to be in disarray over the affair. And new allegations have surfaced suggesting that knowledge of the controversial arms shipments - and the circle of those who knew about them - may have been more widespread than the administration has acknowledged. (Details of covert operation continue to emerge, Page 3.)

Questions about the extent of the operation are multiplying faster than the White House seems able to answer them. Even some of Mr. Reagan's staunchest

supporters are calling for a White House staff shake-up.

The administration seems reluctant to face the challenge head-on and is still trying to assess the political and foreign-policy damage of the scandal.

The President, in his weekly radio address, barely touched on the controversy. While acknowledging that the White House has been "occupied with the Iranian issues over the past two weeks," he added, "let's not forget that there are many other issues that concern us."

But Democrats - and some Republicans - were warning the President that that strategy would not work.

Republican Sen. Larry Pressler of South Dakota, a strong Reagan supporter, professed himself "weary of defending the President" and called for the resignation of White House chief of staff Donald Regan. The senator argued that if Mr. Regan did not know about the arms transfers, he should have. That is the dilemma facing the administration. If it admits to widespread knowledge of the arrangement, it risks charges of illegality. If it denies knowledge, it risks charges of incompetence.

In a Democratic response to Reagan's address, Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan of New York issued a blunt warning: "Your presidency, sir, is tottering. . . . Only you can save it and only if you will talk with us, the Congress."

Two congressional committees have asked the White House to provide documents relating to the arms ship-

ments. The Senate Intelligence Committee is already conducting an inquiry, and several other panels are considering launching probes.

Republican Senate majority leader Robert Dole has called upon the President to convene a special session of Congress and appoint a select committee to investigate the Iranian arms shipment and the diversion of funds. He said on ABC-TV's "This Week with David Brinkley" that a single authoritative probe would be preferable to having a number of investigations into the matter.

The Justice Department continues to conduct its own probe, on orders from the President. But there is growing criticism of it, because Attorney General Edwin Meese III is a close friend and political ally of the President. It's already been reported, for example, that Mr. Meese allowed Mr. Regan, a potential target of the investigations, to sit in on presidential briefings about them.

The probes have been complicated even before they begin, however, by the allegation - so far neither officially confirmed nor denied by the administration - that former National Security Council (NSC) official Oliver L. North, shredded key documents to keep them from investigators. The documents allegedly detailed the methods by which the arms-sale money was channeled, through a numbered Swiss bank account, to the contras.

The NSC's former director, Vice-Adm. John M. Poindexter, has also reportedly destroyed documents, although these were, according to some accounts, not related to the matter under investigation.

Earlier, Attorney General Meese indicated that Colonel North alone appears to have been responsible for the operation. North was fired last Tuesday, the same day Admiral Poindexter resigned.

But there is widespread speculation that other administration officials may be linked to the case, although there is as yet no firm evidence. The Washington Post reported that the Justice Department is questioning whether the Central Intelligence Agency may have played a role. CIA director William J. Casey has been an ardent supporter of the Nicaraguan contras.

Court documents released last week indicate that a West Coast businessman claims to have informed a member of Vice-President George Bush's staff that the contras were getting the proceeds from arms shipments to Iran well before the administration acknowledged awareness of the arrangement.

The vice-president has been notably silent since details of the affair became public. That has sparked speculation on whether Mr. Bush's presidential aspirations have been dealt a setback by the scandal.

Preoccupation with the controversy has obscured other important issues, notably the US decision last week to breach the SALT II treaty. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev called the move a "major mistake." Some US allies seemed to agree. A number of congressmen called upon the President to move back into compliance with the treaty, and they threatened legislation to compel that action.

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